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THE MÉDOC AND ITS WINES.

A VISIT to the Médoc startles a plain man with a glimpse of his gross ignorance. Probably he has hitherto believed that but two or three clarets (or half-a-dozen at the most) were entitled to bear the sounding prefix of 'Château' upon their pleasant bottles. The truth is so very different. This sunny upland and sloping district on the south bank of the Gironde teems with châteaux. For miles you cannot go a quarter of a mile in any direction without passing or seeing two or three: each with its vineyards and cellars and special labels and reputation of higher or lower degree in the claret-loving world. There is Château-Latour and there is (or there well may be) the Château-Smith. Every one knows about the one. The wines of the other may, on the other hand, go regularly from the vineyards of the Château-Smith by boat to London, and thence arrive at their cobwebby destination in the cellars of the Twickenham villa of Mr John Smith, butcher, baker, draper or what you will. The world wots not of the Château-Smith and its wines, and yet they may have a bouquet and colour that would not disgrace a Château-Margaux or Château-Lafite claret.

It is a gay, warm, opulent region, this of the Médoc. The prevailing colours in September and early October are green and blue and purple. The trees have not yet lost their leaves, nor have the vines taken on their gorgeous tints of decay. The skies are blue, and so are the blouses of the well-nurtured peasants of the land. And the grapes are for the most part ripe or fast ripening. There is much here besides vineyards. Most of the châteaux are extremely desirable country residences, standing in comfortable little parks or with snug farmsteads attached to them. The directory of the district, after mentioning the number of hectares belonging to this or that château, specifies also its number of milking-cows. Shady copses and tracts of pines are also abundant. And

there are hedgerows enough by Blanquefort and elsewhere, parting vines from cabbages and cabbages from orchards.

At this season it is just as well to keep one's conscience under lock and key while strolling among the vines. You are naturally not permitted to help yourself to the clusters; yet the temptation is in fact irresistible. On a single plant there may be a dozen burdensome clusters. One or two have broken loose and lie in the furrow. Why, you ask yourself, may you not take one of them? This is the first stage of inevitable theft. Moreover, on the white road which winds between the vineyards (some fenced with oak laths, some with barbed wire, and some quite unfenced), you see many traces of previous larcenies—stripped stalks and the like—ravages committed, probably enough, by representatives of the rough classes of Bordeaux, who drift towards the Médoc at the picking-time as surely as the Whitechapel hoppers take train to Kent in the hop season. They are not loved in the Médoc, these Bordeaux vagabonds, but they have to be endured.

One of the trials of the Médoc are the trains by which it is necessary to journey thither from Bordeaux. Expresses are rare. Your usual luck is a goods-train—to the far end of which a couple of ancient passenger cars are attached. The pace is fearfully slow; the halts are long out of all reason. Eight to ten miles an hour is fair speed in such adventures. But this very slowness gives you admirable opportunity of noticing the landscape and marking the soil of the different vineyards.

There are châteaux in all styles: towered and turreted, semi-feudal in aspect, Renaissance, Palladian, or one-storeyed and homely as the most unpretentious of farmsteads. The majority of them are, sad to say, not used regularly for residential purposes. They are merely appurtenances to the vineyards—pretexts for a label. This or that Bordeaux merchant, Englishman, Russian, or Dutchman, is their fortunate pos-

sector. If the gentleman runs down for two or three days in the vintage-time, it is enough for him. For the rest of the year, the *régisseur* or steward has the run of the place, with its large untenanted rooms, its greensward, chestnut and platane avenues, and bright patches of red geraniums studding the turf of its bijou park. The stately wrought-iron gates which intersect the avenue or main approach to the house are probably rusty from disuse.

But if the château is dull and rather depressing in itself, there is life enough round it. Here in snug little houses dwell the retainers, the men who pick the grapes, carry and press them, and do the other work with a skill and caution that shall not imperil the reputation of this particular label. And there is a portly (even majestic) *chef des caves*, if the château is famous, who lends dignity to the wine he is so happy to show to the accredited visitor. As a spectacle, however, there is nothing exciting about the cellars and warehouses attached to the château. There is little or no old wine here. That has long since gone into private hands. The fluid you are invited to taste is merely a 'Grand Ordinaire,' which, in spite of the Médoc wine's gift of rapid development, cannot be expected to excite your palate inordinately. A course of château visiting tends to stomach-aches rather than ecstatic exhilaration.

Only by a journey to the very head of the long promontory between the Atlantic and the Gironde can one form an idea of the prodigious quantity of the Médoc wines. For fifty miles you are never quite out of sight of vineyards. Here and there they absorb the horizon on both sides. They are strikingly different in quality, however, as has been said. A patch of wizened, shrivelled plants, with few leaves and no alluring clusters, may be seen absolutely contiguous to a vineyard full of fine healthy fruit. It is of course an affair of cultivation and soil. Like other things, the Médoc grape responds eagerly to loving care. You may have plants of first-class pedigree and the soil that suits them best, and yet fail to produce a distinguished wine, if your cultivators are not of as good quality as your plants. Like hops in England, the vines are most sensitive to human attention. One marvels a little at the apparently rude nature of the soil to the vines on which labels with famous names are affixed. But the truth is the Médoc vine does not want to be excessively pampered. Give it a good rough gravelly soil, with a fair proportion of sand underneath (for superfluous rains to vanish readily into), and it will be as grateful to you as it well knows how to be. A gravelly subsoil yields wine remarkable for delicacy; but if there be a preponderance of stones in the subsoil, the wine will be strong rather than delicate, appealing to the brain more than to the palate.

Approximately, one-fifth of the area of the department of the Gironde is devoted to vine-growing, and the proportion is constantly on the increase. No wonder the whole district gets to some extent excited as the time for the harvest arrives. There have been perils enough to face from spring to autumn, but these got through, and the goal nearly achieved, the blow

is felt the more if it happens, as it sometimes does, that very heavy rains or even hail-storms descend upon the ripe grapes and burst them by the million where they hang apparently begging to be picked and pressed. Science can do much nowadays to help the vine-growers to combat the various ailments and insect pests which attack the plants. There are scores of preparations of sulphur and insecticide powders; and while women and children are turned loose in the rows to gather the epicurean snails which feast on the leaves, poultry also play their part of protectors in eating the caterpillars and other small fry. Frost is less easily fought; yet that also is frustrated to some extent. But the occasional downpours of autumn are irresistible. The grower can only fold his arms and hope the damage will be little rather than great.

The claret grapes compare very favourably for size with those of the Champagne district. One is tempted much more in the Médoc than in the Marne valley. But, on the other hand, the Bordeaux cellars do not engross like those of Rheims and Epernay. Claret, in fact, matures for the market less sensationally than champagne. One does not here in Bordeaux go among the bottles half expectant of a bombardment, or see any of the litter of broken glass and corks which in a Rheims cellar often hint at the force so strongly imprisoned on both hands. Nor is it, as has been suggested, much of a pleasure to drink a glass of comparatively new claret (howsoever fine a wine) among the barrels and cobwebs of a Bordeaux cellar, with the portly cellarman looking on and awaiting what he is innocent enough to call your judgment. At Rheims, even a tyro in tasting may praise indiscriminately, and be sure he is not betraying his ignorance. But claret varies vastly with the vintage; and none but an expert and accomplished palate may dare to say what is good, what is bad, and what is mediocre.

The cobwebs will seem to an impressionable visitor the noblest things in the Bordeaux cellars. Some of them look like thick pile curtains, sombre in hue, of course, but famously suggestive of warmth. And with even only a moderate imagination, one may go to and fro among the barrels fancying the pendent shapes overhead are dusky stalactites instead of the airy next-to-nothings they really are. If you hold your candle high enough, you may shrivel a few yards of the fabric. But that were truly a shocking deed of vandalism, for, though no layman can understand why this dismal tapestry is revered as it is, his ignorance will not be held sufficient excuse for his crime.

It is well, after seeing vineyards and cellars, to recur to the quays of Bordeaux herself, and then look around and mark the magnitude of some of the city's finest mercantile houses. Only thus is it possible to guess at the mighty influence of claret. The river Gironde is not in itself a very engaging stream hereabouts. Its colour is always pea-soupy, and it is not dominated by anything in the nature of mountains. But it looks on many enchanting country residences which owe their foundation stones to claret, and on its turbid bosom it bears many

ships to the metropolis of French wines. Few cities have so kindly a repute as Bordeaux—a repute also ascribable to claret. Of course, however, something depends upon the vintage of the year. No reasonable man will expect a merchant to show him as cheerful a countenance of welcome in 1892, for example, as in 1893, when coopers made fortunes in the demand for barrels to accommodate the wine of a phenomenal season.

AN ELECTRIC SPARK.*

CHAPTER XXIV.—A DEFENDER IN DESPAIR.

THE Endoza brougham had just rolled away from the Daltons'.

'Ah, my dear child,' said Miss Bryne, shaking her head. 'She is light and gay, and perhaps a trifle frivolous to you, but she loves you, *Rénée*, and her manners are natural to her and the climate from which she comes.'

'Perhaps so, aunt, but I begin to be very weary of Isabel and her sweet, sickly ways.'

'Oh, don't say that, my dear. You see she has missed for years that which you have enjoyed, the guardianship of one who has always tried to play a mother's part.'

'You have always been loving and tender to me, aunt, dear,' said *Rénée*, kissing affectionately the slightly withered cheek nearest to her.

'Thank you, my dear,' said Miss Bryne, responding to the loving embrace; and a faint colour appeared in her cheek which might have been due to *Rénée's* kiss, only that the same hue blossomed in the other, as she went on: 'If dear little Isabel had some one motherly always near her, she would be very different. You see,' she added hastily, as if in dread that her niece should give her words a meaning, 'we must not judge Isabel by our standard. Of course she has been highly educated here, but she comes from a country rising out of barbarism. The things which jar upon us spoiled people of fashion are only the pristine innocence of her nature, and remind me of the playful gambols of a very young cat—I might say kitten. Really, *Rénée*, I love her very dearly.'

There was silence in the drawing-room at South Audley Street for a few minutes, during which *Rénée* sat very sad and thoughtful, and she suddenly awoke to the fact that her aunt was gazing at her pensively.

Rénée started and coloured, and Miss Bryne shook her head meaningly.

'Ah, my dear,' she said, 'I wish I could see you look happier.'

'Pray, pray, my dear aunt, say no more.'

'I must, my dear, for every one's sake.'

Rénée made a gesture full of despair, and then resigned herself to her fate.

'I think a great deal about some one and his sufferings, my child, and I think a great deal about you, for you are verging, my darling, you are indeed.'

'Oh, aunt!' cried *Rénée*, half in vexation,

half in despair; and Miss Bryne's tongue went softly on.

'I think so much of you, my darling, and compare you so with myself—when I was about your age. For I will not attempt to deceive you, my dear: it is nothing to be ashamed of. There was once a little episode in my life which kept me single up till now.'

'Indeed, aunt!' said *Rénée*, glad to receive the small mercy of her aunt talking about herself, instead of some one else.

'Yes, my dear. It is verging, I know, to speak about it, but you can think and feel now; and there is no harm in my confiding the little trouble to you. He was an officer, my dear—a fine, tall, gallant-looking fellow—it was when we were living at Canterbury—and he used to pass our house regularly with his men, and at last he used to bow to me.'

'Aunt,' said *Rénée*, with a sad smile, 'I never knew that you had so much romance in your life.'

'No, my dear, I suppose not; but most ladies have some sprigs of dried lavender hidden away, only making their presence known by their perfume; and you, dearest, are beginning to dry some up for the future. Heigho!'

Rénée frowned, but said nothing, and her aunt went on bringing out her own particular sprig to inhale its scent.

'Then he went out to India with a draft, my dear, and he must have been killed, poor fellow, for I never saw him again.'

'But you would certainly have heard, aunt,' said *Rénée*, interested now in the tiny bit of sentiment in spite of herself.

'No, my darling: I never heard,' said the lady, wiping away a tear.

'Poor auntie!' said *Rénée*, affectionately laying a white soft hand upon one showing the throbbing veins through the skin.

'Thank you, my dear. It changed the current of my early life, for I clung to the hope that he would return some day, and pass once more and bow. But he never did, and he must have fallen somewhere beneath the torrid sun.'

'But, aunt dear, the despatches would certainly have given his name if he had been killed: they always do. Did you inquire or search?'

'No, my love. I never knew his name.'

'Never knew his name!' said *Rénée*, with a curious look of perplexity on her brow.

'No, my dear; we never spoke: we only bowed—only bowed? We loved, I am sure: I could read it in his eyes, as he passed before me the last time, onward to his death, for he must have been slain by some cruel Afghan or Sikh. But I felt that he loved me: I know he did, and—Dear me, who's that?'

'Only me, aunt,' said Brant, entering hastily, and making Miss Bryne jump. 'Ah, *Rénée*, how are you?'

'Quite well, Brant,' said *Rénée* gravely; and then she looked again at her cousin's disturbed face.

'Why, Brant, my dear boy, what is it?' cried Miss Bryne. '*Rénée*, dear, touch the bell for some fresh tea: the poor fellow looks quite worn out.'

'Tea!' echoed Brant with a hoarse melodramatic laugh. 'I feel as if I want a draught of boiling brandy, or something stronger than that.'

'Gracious me, child! What is the matter?' cried Miss Bryne. 'No bad news?'

'News? I don't call it news. It's horrible! I feel as if it were all some cursed nightmare, or a delirious dream.'

'Brant, dear, you turn me quite faint,' cried Miss Bryne. 'Speak out at once, I beg of you.' 'Oh, all right,' he said; 'you must know, but you had better go away, *Rénée*, my dear. I don't want to hurt your feelings, knowing what your ideas are.'

Miss Bryne uttered a wild cry.

'I know—I know!' she cried, gesticulating with her hands.

'Do you! Then don't you think *Rén* had better go?'

'Yes—yes—yes.—Pray, pray, go, my dear,' she cried; but *Rénée's* brows contracted, and though her hands trembled she kept her seat.

'Do you hear, *Rén*; you'd better go,' said Brant.

'No: I will stay,' she said firmly.

'Oh, do go, before he tells us, my darling,' cried her aunt. 'Did—did you send for Dr Kilpatrick, Brant?'

'Send for him? No!'

'I don't like him, but he is clever.—*Rénée*, my darling, do go. I felt a presentiment that something was going to happen. Do pray go before he tells us Mr Wynyan has been caught by one of the wheels at the works and crushed to death.'

'I wish to goodness he had been!' roared Brant, as *Rénée* turned pale as death, and seemed about to fall from her seat.

'What; isn't it that?' came to her through the singing noise in her ears.

'Bah! No. A scoundrel—a cursed scoundrel!'

'Not taken away the cash-box, Brant?'

'Aunt, don't be such an old—goose!' cried Brant. 'It's worse than that—ten times worse.'

'Oh, my dear, then what is it?' cried Miss Bryne.

'We've found him out at last—at least the government has,' said Brant hoarsely, as he avoided his cousin's eyes, which seemed to be looking him through and through.

'Oh, my dear, thorns are nothing to it,' cried Miss Bryne; 'pray, pray, tell us the worst.'

'Well, I suppose I must,' said Brant, 'if *Rénée* won't go. She has to hear it sooner or later, and sooner hurts least. Shall I go on, *Rén*?'

'Yes; tell me everything.'

'Well, you know of uncle's great invention?'

'Yes, my dear,' said Miss Bryne.

'He has sold us.'

'I don't know what you mean, Brant, my dear; but it must be very dreadful, I'm sure. Pray, pray, speak.'

'It was a secret, of course, sold to our government, and that scoundrel Wynyan copied the plans and drawings, and sold them to some foreign power.'

'Who dares say that?' cried *Rénée*, rising with her eyes flashing. 'It is not true.'

'Government says it,' cried Brant, producing the official letter. 'I don't ask you to believe me. Read for yourself.'

'I cannot; I will not,' cried *Rénée*. 'Mr Wynyan is a true gentleman, and could not be guilty of such a treacherous act.'

'Then why did he steal the plans away from the office safe, and keep them for a week?'

'Mr Wynyan did not, could not,' cried *Rénée*.

'Very well. Don't believe it, then. All I know is, that he brought them back to me. Hamber was in there, and he owned to bringing them back himself.'

'And what will happen, now, Brant?' cried Miss Bryne.

'Happen? That it's all up for good, and we are going to the dogs.'

'No, aunt,' cried *Rénée* quietly; and she turned a scornful look on her cousin. 'Brant has some grounds, perhaps, for making such a charge; but as far as Mr Wynyan is concerned, not a word is true.'

(To be continued.)

COTTON-SEED OIL.

THE cotton-seed oil industry, though it can boast but a comparatively recent origin, bids fair to attain to great importance. As the name of this product implies, it is the oil obtained by crushing the seeds of the cotton plant. Probably cotton-seed oil has always been known to cotton producers; but it is only within the last twenty years that even an eminently practical people like the cotton farmers of the United States have realised the commercial possibilities of the product. Before the great civil war occurred between the Northern and the Southern States, the Texas and South Carolina planters had hardly heard of this oil. New conditions, however, prevailed with the advent of peace. Great Britain was not so dependent upon the United States for her cotton supplies as she had been. The Southern planters, too, had to work on the most economical lines possible, and thus cotton products regarded during the 'ante-bellum days' as of no account, were carefully utilised. Still, cotton-seed oil made slow progress, and the year 1867 saw only some four mills for crushing the seed in the United States. At the close of last year, however, the number had increased to two hundred and fifty-three, of which no fewer than twenty-seven are in South Carolina.

England, too, has a big share of this oil business. Whole cargoes of cotton seed, frequently in bulk, are brought to this country, principally from Alexandria. The United States used to send us vast quantities of this seed. She now does so no longer, crushing the seed and manufacturing the various products derived from it herself. Hull is the principal port to which these consignments of Egyptian and Brazilian cotton seed find their way, the manufacture of vegetable oils being a very important one at the Humberside town. It is well known that the raw cotton of commerce is the fluffy or downy fibre surrounding the seeds of the cotton plant. When the cotton is picked and the seeds excluded, it is only to

be expected that some portion of the fibre remains attached to the seeds. Before the seeds are crushed, this has to be carefully removed. The process is aptly described as delinting, and the lint or cotton picked off in the process, though short in the staple, is extremely fine and silky to the touch, and has a high commercial value, being especially sought after by manufacturers of gun-cotton.

No portion of the seed is wasted. Formerly, the hulls or shells were regarded as possessing no commercial value, and were merely used as fuel. Now, however, it has been amply demonstrated that fuel of this description is extremely costly. They are largely used as cattle food, being mixed for that purpose with the cotton meal, the crushed kernel of the cotton seed. Formerly, the seed meal used to be almost wholly exported to Great Britain or the Continent of Europe, where its efficacy as a cattle fattener has long been duly recognised. Much, however, of the seed meal is now despatched from the cotton areas to the towns or cattle-raising centres of the north and west of the United States; while another considerable portion of the output is returned to the land, mixed with phosphates as a fertiliser, to promote the growth of future cotton crops.

Strange as it may seem, the oil manufactured in England is held superior to that produced in the United States, on account of its greater clearness and better colour. But where even ordinary care is taken in the manufacturing process, the resultant product is an extremely attractive and wholesome vegetable oil. Among the inhabitants of the United States, where conservatism in old-established customs does not obtain to the same extent as in England, cotton-seed oil is rapidly achieving popularity. Many housewives prefer it in their culinary processes to lards and animal fats of a like nature and an equally dubious origin. In fact, cotton-seed oil enters very largely into the composition of many of the compounds usually denominated 'lard.'

In England, when an attempt was made some years ago to popularise the product, the effort failed, the want of success being largely due, it is said, to the uncleanly methods of a certain class of public caterers, who were by no means slow to recognise the suitability of the new oil for the requirements of their own particular business. There are in London, and most provincial towns as well, institutions rejoicing in the suggestive name of 'Fried-fish shops,' or 'Fried-fish establishments.' The enterprising caterers who thus minister to the requirements of a large section of the lower stratum of society in the matter of a fried-fish diet, are much addicted to the use of cotton-seed oil as the oleaginous medium in which they fry their fish. Now the oil itself is wholesome and odourless, and possesses not a single objectionable property, and is capitally suited for this purpose. Unfortunately, however, the profits attached to the running of a fried-fish establishment are not of the colossal

order. Competition, too, in this walk of life is keen, and thus rigorous economy is absolutely necessary. Thus the oil employed is utilised again and again, and hence the combination of ancient and fish-like smells, which compels the wayfarer to protect his olfactory nerves from their contact. In spite, however, of the bad odour into which cotton-seed oil has fallen on this account, it is slowly but surely gaining popular favour. 'Cottolene,' a lard-like preparation from the oil, is stated by those who have tried it, to be quite equal to the ordinary lard of domestic use.

Much of the oil manufactured in the States is exported to the various Mediterranean ports, more especially to Marseilles, Genoa, and Naples. It is not difficult to tell what becomes of it. Some of it is, of course, used by the poorer classes as a substitute for the dearer olive-oil. The bulk of it, however, is sold as that article, being first of all mixed with olive-oil, or else 'prepared,' and then sold right out as olive-oil. But the inhabitants of the United States do not escape all consequences from the trade fraud which, innocently or otherwise, they are the means of perpetrating upon the citizens of Italy or the countries adjacent. The population of the great North American Republic includes many subjects who claim Italy, France, or Spain as the land of their birth. They are large consumers of olive-oil, and that from their fatherland is of course the best. Sad, however, to relate, much of the olive-oil exported from Marseilles, Genoa, or Naples to the United States is just cotton-seed oil, shipped originally from North American ports, doctored a little, perhaps, up the Mediterranean, and then sent back as the product of native olive yards.

Much cotton-seed oil is also exported to Antwerp, some of the vessels engaged in carrying it having been specially built, much on the lines of a petroleum tanker, to carry the oil in bulk. Dutch and Belgian enterprise has discovered dozens of methods in which cotton-seed oil may be utilised, and it is an open secret that it enters very largely into the composition of a variety of products, whose principal constituents are generally supposed to be animal fat.

Regrettable as these frauds may be, they serve to indicate the usefulness of the oil as a food-stuff. When the public recognition of this fact increases, cotton-seed oil products will be better able to stand upon their own merits, and there will no longer be the necessity or temptation to disguise this useful article of food under other names. The future which awaits the oil industry is certainly a great one. It is already an important factor in determining the income of the cotton-planter, and while the staple itself continues at its present price, must be of the greatest importance to him. The mills pay well, and the twenty-seven crushing establishments situated in South Carolina dealt in 1894 with no less than seventy-five thousand tons of seed, valued at eight hundred thousand dollars. From this seed sixty thousand barrels of oil, twenty-six thousand tons of cotton-seed meal, five thousand bales of linters—the fine cotton attached to the seed—and twenty-five thousand tons of hulls were

obtained. And yet it is not many years ago that the commercial value of cotton seed, apart from its use in propagating its kind, was almost entirely unsuspected.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN LLAMA.

CHAPTER IV.—THE NARRATIVE.

SEARCH as I would, I could find no trace of the golden llama. It had been in its place on my writing-table on the previous morning, when I started for my long walk. Of that I felt assured. How and when and by whom had it been removed? That it was valuable—valuable as mere bullion, apart from its antiquarian interest—I knew full well; but who was there, knowing of its existence and of its value, who should come to the lodgings in Kennington to steal it from my writing-table? No one had visited me in my new quarters. It was the general impression, I believe—and I had not attempted to remove it—that I had gone into the country for a few weeks' holiday. Who was there, then, who should have stolen the golden llama?

Gradually, but irresistibly, the conviction forced itself upon me that the thief could be no other than Miss M'Rae herself. Her demeanour that night, when I encountered her on the stairs, her avoidance of me, her evident fright, and the boldness with which she sought to cover it—all spoke to me of guilt. True, she was intoxicated; but was that sufficient in itself to account for the strangeness of her behaviour? Too late, I regretted the carelessness with which I had exposed my priceless treasure to the eyes of one whom I had already discovered to be untrustworthy.

I attended the inquest on the body of my late landlady in the hope that some clew might be dropped in the course of the inquiry which would lead me to the recovery of that which I had lost. I followed all the evidence—it was but scanty—with minute care, plied the witnesses (after the inevitable verdict of self-destruction had been hurriedly pronounced) with further questions bearing on the point I had in view; but all my investigation was fruitless. The unfortunate woman had been seen loitering in the neighbourhood of a pawnbroker's shop, an hour or two before her death, had been seen, in fact, gazing through the open shop-door—so much I ascertained; but my anxious inquiry at the shop in question was met with the reply that nothing resembling my missing property had been offered in pledge on that night.

And so the second tragedy passed away and was buried, like its victim, in the common, nameless grave of the Forgotten; and I went back once more to take up my abode in the house where the golden llama had first encountered my sight.

I had resigned all hope of seeing it again. The police had made inquiries; a description of it had been circulated; all was of no avail. At last the idea occurred to me of inserting an advertisement in the daily papers. I had but little hope that it would bring me tidings of the missing object; but I felt that even its insertion would be a satisfaction to me.

Within a couple of days it appeared—a brief, tersely-worded advertisement, addressed to 'pawn-brokers and others,' offering a handsome reward to any one who should give me information of the whereabouts of an ancient gilt figure (which I described) supposed to represent a llama, which had been taken from a house in Southampton Terrace, Kennington, on or about the twenty-first of March.

On the very day of its publication it brought me a visitor.

He was announced to me by Mrs Placer as 'a gentleman calling himself Professor Pardoe—an elderly gentleman, if you please, sir—who wants to see you not very particular; but would be glad of a minute, if you could spare it, sir.' On my acquiescence, he was shown into the room. The professor was a little, stout man, with snow-white hair that curled over the collar of his frock-coat, a very ruddy face, and twinkling gray eyes that beamed benignantly through gold-rimmed spectacles. They beamed all the more, I daresay, because he felt some awkwardness in the nature of his visit.

He began by profusely apologising for it.

'I trust I do not interrupt you at a busy moment, my dear sir? It is only an instant that I need detain you. My mission is very trivial—all too trivial, I fear, to justify my intrusion. At the same time, I could not deny myself the pleasure of satisfying a somewhat unwarrantable curiosity respecting an advertisement which appeared above your name in this morning's *Times*.'

My attention was riveted in an instant.

'Your name is not unknown to me,' my voluble visitor continued, 'although I have never had the pleasure of conversing with you. It was brought before my notice some twelve months since in a very lamentable connection—in connection with the proceedings relative to the death of my dear friend Almirez.'

'You knew Señor Almirez?' I ejaculated. In the same instant his name came back to me. Almirez had spoken more than once of Professor Pardoe, a friend and somewhat of a rival of his in his earlier days of travel, since become a scientific writer of some note.

'Undoubtedly! I was sure that I could not be mistaken. Your name was familiar to me at once. It was this coincidence—the coincidence of the person who had lost this curious object, described in the advertisement, being the friend of my friend—that led me to pay you this very impertinent and intrusive visit. And now, my dear sir, I am going to be still more impertinent. I am going to ask you some questions.'

And the stout little gentleman leaned back comfortably in his chair, beaming upon me with benign effulgence.

'In the first place, I am going to ask you, was this given to you by Almirez? Of course

it was! I can see it by your face. Could you describe it to me? I have the advertisement here—touching his pocket—but could you give me any further particulars about the "gilt figure supposed to represent a llama?" I ask with a purpose.

What his purpose could possibly be, I was at a loss to imagine; but his manner of asking the questions was so unaffected, so entirely free from being merely inquisitive or aggressive, that I willingly entered into a fairly minute description of the golden llama. As I proceeded, the professor's genial face began to assume a puzzled, wondering look, and his eyes turned musingly towards the floor. When I had finished he spoke again.

'Was this in Almirez' possession at the time of his death, can you tell me? or had he—Believe me, my dear sir,' he broke off suddenly, into a tone of great earnestness, 'these are no idle questions. There is, there may be, some mischief in this matter, some terrible mystery that you and I can hardly dream of. I cannot tell yet. It may all depend upon your answer to my question—was this image in Almirez' possession on the day of his death?'

I told him everything—told him how Almirez had given it to me, how I had returned it to his room, how it had been found after his death. For some moments after I had finished speaking, the professor sat quite still, his face clouded over with some great brooding trouble, his lips murmuring inarticulately.

'Strange, strange!' I heard him mutter.

At last he roused himself.

'How did you come to lose it?' he said simply. 'What happened?'

It was soon told. I had lost it—had it stolen from my rooms—on the anniversary of Almirez' death. I could only suspect my landlady, whom I had already found out to be untrustworthy. On the night when the golden llama disappeared, she had left the house in a strange manner, and some hours afterwards, apparently in a fit of drunken remorse, she had thrown herself into the Thames.

As I mentioned the fact of Miss M'Rae's tragic death, the professor sprang up from his chair excitedly.

'A second suicide!' he almost shouted. 'And on the same day!'

What could his conduct mean? Somewhat irritably, I am afraid, I asked him to explain himself. He was pacing up and down the room, with his brows knit and his hands clasped nervously behind him. Suddenly he paused in his walk and turned towards me; but, in place of answering my question, he asked me yet another.

'You have heard nothing of this thing since—do not know where it is now?' he asked.

Very decidedly I answered in the negative, and then repeated my former question, but for some time it met with no response. Gradually, however, the professor's stride slackened; his hands loosened and dropped to his sides; and at last he seated himself once more in the chair opposite my own and fixed his eyes searchingly upon my face.

'What I am about to confide to you, my dear sir,' he began, 'is but suspicion; but suspi-

cion so striking, so positive, that to my mind at least it has the force of certainty. Were it not so, I would have kept silence. I have told you that I was a friend of Juan Almirez. Month after month in days gone by we have lived together in the same hunting-camp or been engaged together on the same expedition. I was his senior by many years; yet I was able to admire to the full his impetuous energy, his indomitable fixity of purpose. I have told you also that I was immediately struck by the coincidence that you, a friend of Almirez, had lost the golden figure of which you have given me a description. I will tell you now that that description answers minutely to the description of an ancient sacred symbol which was stolen from the natives of a little Peruvian village in Sierra at a time when Almirez and I were pursuing historical researches in the neighbourhood. Further, that Almirez was strongly suspected—though at the time I thought unjustly—of being the thief.'

The professor paused, and I intervened in defence of my dead friend.

'You will allow me to say that your conclusion seems a trifle hasty? There is nothing, I take it, very distinctive or peculiar in the figure given to me by Almirez. Why, then, should you assume against him so readily that he could be guilty of such an act?'

'You are right, my dear young sir,' the professor replied blandly. 'There is nothing very distinctive about it. There may be—I daresay there are—a dozen or more of such figures in existence, all of which answer more or less to the description of the stolen image. But there were other reasons—reasons depending on matters which you have disclosed to me in the course of our conversation this afternoon—which led me irresistibly to form the assumption which you so deprecate. Almirez had a special motive for desiring to possess himself of this particular thing. There was a curious tale that was told of it by the natives, a curious superstition attaching to it, that roused all his passion for the acquisition of strange and wonderful objects. How strong was his desire to possess himself of it—to test the truth of the superstition, as he grimly said—I know from conversation that I have held with him; I know also how high a price he offered for it, and how the natives, in horror at the suggestion, refused his overtures. The tale was this. Long years ago, in the evil days that followed the Spanish conquest and the death of Francisco Pizarro, a band of Spanish brigand-soldiers burst into the little village. It was the morning of the great festival of the spring equinox, and all the folk were gathered in the Temple of the Sun. Thither the soldiers ran. It was the old tale of quest for hidden booty, of outraged Christianity whose indignation could only be appeased by gold. They seized the priest, as he stood offering sacrifice, and demanded that the idolatrous treasure of the temple should be given up to them. But no treasure was to be found—perhaps it had gone towards the ransom of the Inca or been plundered in an earlier raid—and, refusing to disclose any hiding-place of wealth, the aged priest was put to the torture. In the extremity of his anguish he pointed out to his tormentors

the spot where the sole remaining treasure of the temple lay buried, but added, so they say, these fateful words: "In whose hand shall be found the sacred llama of the Sun, by his hand shall he fall this day!" The soldiers unearthed the treasure; and, enraged at its meanness, they put the priest to death. Then, the story goes, they fell to gaming; and the captain, who had taken possession of the treasure, lost heavily and slew himself before nightfall. What happened to the sacred llama in the long years that followed is unrecorded; but in our days at least it had come back into the possession of the natives of the village, who, though nominally Christians, retained much unacknowledged sympathy with their ancient worship. Along with the sacred figure a superstition had survived—the superstition that it should prove fatal to its owner, whosoever he might be, on the day of the spring equinox. Accordingly, it had always been the custom in the early days of March for a procession to go forth, bearing the golden llama, to the site of the ancient temple of the Sun, and there with much ceremony to inter it among the ruins; nor was it disinterred or touched again until the month of March was passed over. It was during one of these periods of its internment (when, as I have said, Almiraz and I were camping in the neighbourhood) that it was stolen. When the day arrived on which it should be exhumed, the procession mounted the steep path that led to the ruined temple; but the men returned horror-struck. The ground had been newly broken and the sacred figure removed. There were circumstances undoubtedly which pointed to Almiraz as having been the guilty man; but I refused to believe it. I can only say now that my belief has suffered change.

Towards the close of the professor's long speech a horrible idea had been shaping itself within my mind.

'Do you mean to say—that you believe Almiraz' death—in any way'—I began.

'Who shall say?' he replied. 'We know the facts. Who will be so bold as to draw the inference from them? And yet *his* death, the death of your landlady—both on the same day, both on the day of the spring equinox—both dead by their own hand! Of course one can advance arguments: his superstitious terror, confronted suddenly on that night of all nights by the object which he thought he had safely disposed of; her guilty shame, weighing her down with the intolerable sense of crime and the instant fear of detection. It may have been so. One hopes it may have been so. And yet, my dear sir, fool or lunatic as you may think me, I will freely confess to you that my mind will know no ease until this accursed image has been once more returned to a position where its fateful influence can wreak no harm.'

Years have rolled by, and I have heard no more of it. Many months since Professor Pardoe was laid in an honoured grave. I remain the sole witness of the strange facts that I have related. Whether I really believe in the professor's ghastly explanation, I hardly know myself; but I know that it is a relief to me to think, and to believe, that the rolling tide of

the river, when it closed that night over the head of the unhappy woman, buried for ever in its sludgy bed the mystery of the golden llama.

CAVALRY ON THE LINE OF MARCH.

IN the hope that it may prove of interest to non-military readers to know something about the way in which a cavalry regiment is transported from one garrison town to another, I will describe shortly what was at once the longest and most arduous march out of many which I shared in during nine years' service in a Lancer regiment in England and Ireland. It is now some years ago that the —th were quartered in Woolwich, and the 'route'—as the order to march is technically termed—came one afternoon for us to start the next morning for York.

The entire regiment does not march in one body, but goes piecemeal, a squadron (a fourth) at a time. The second party starts two days after the first, and so on. Sick men, recruits, and a few others go by train.

Each squadron is preceded on the road by a billeting-party, consisting of two sergeants and their batmen. These set out on the afternoon before their main body. On entering the appointed town, they repair to the police-station and secure their own billet. They go round to various inns the next morning in the company of a policeman, placing as many men and horses together as possible, with a non-commissioned-officer in charge, till the whole are provided for. It is a rule that a man and his horse must not be more than a quarter of a mile apart. When the troops arrive, about midday, they are met by the billeting-sergeants, who distribute the 'billets' amongst them. The remainder of the day is devoted to grooming horses and cleaning kits.

In the evening, the sergeant-major visits all the billets to pay accounts. These are: for a horse 1s. 9d., for a man 1s. 4d. per day; in return for 8 lb. of straw, 12 lb. of hay, and 10 lb. of corn for the former; for the latter, lodging and dinner, the only meal officially recognised, consisting of steak, vegetables, pepper, salt, and vinegar, a pint of small beer, and a pennyworth of bread.

To the uninitiated, it must seem a mystery how a man could travel and subsist on the fare provided for him by government, as above described; but it should be stated that when on the march a man receives his full pay of 1s. 2d. per day, and this is supposed to provide in some occult way for the two or three extra meals which it will easily be understood he is able to dispose of. But that is not all.

If the British tax-payer grumbles at the direct inroads on his pocket in the shape of army estimates, he is always ready to open his heart and his purse for Tommy Atkins in person, on the march; and the soldier who does not have a good time then, owing to this fact, has either very hard luck or 'only has himself to blame.' From the first to the last of our halting-places, the experience of my chums and myself was of the happy order. The publicans were kind to us and generous

in the matter of additional fare gratis, and the company at night invariably very liberal. The presence of soldiers in a smoke-room is naturally an attraction to civilians. Could there be surroundings more conducive to the spinning of yarns, or a more trustful, sympathetic audience? For the soldier does spin yarns, with the very remote possibility of there being any one in a position to challenge or contradict them. And when his own stock runs short, his chum plays into his hands by reminding him of what happened to Brown, Jones, or Robinson of the Greys, the Bays, the King's or what not. To tell the truth, there is very little need of romancing. Amongst four hundred men of all sorts and conditions there is continually happening a variety of incidents, grave or gay, of never-failing interest to an ordinary smoke-room company.

Having despatched the billeting-party, I left Woolwich with the first squadron, consisting of about fifty men and sixty horses, ten men leading the spare horses; our first day's march being to Edmonton. Through London, and especially in the City, our pace was slow, a sort of triumphal progress—the cynosure of all eyes, attended by a large contingent of admirers, mostly boys and idlers, some of the former following us for miles; while two of the latter accompanied us to Edmonton and there and then desired to enlist. Our appearance, arms, &c. were freely criticised, and the wildest speculations were indulged in ament our destination, caused, as we afterwards discovered, by a joker in the advanced guard, who gave out that we were bound for the docks, *en route* for a foreign land, at that time the theatre of war. Owing to the intense cold, we were cloaked, and very glad indeed to reach the hospitable inns of Edmonton.

The next instalment of the journey was to Ware. Now, the pleasantness or otherwise of a march is in great measure dependent upon the officer in charge, and we looked forward to a good time, owing to the reputation of our captain in this respect. When about two miles out of Edmonton, we halted for a few moments to tighten girths, &c. On remounting we had a smart trot for a mile or two, dropped again into a walk, and then came the order 'Ride at ease: singers to the front.' On that day there was not a happier squadron in the British Army than ours, despite the cold, and we looked forward to a rare good time. But trouble was in store for us of a kind we little anticipated.

The next march was to Royston, and while we were parading in the morning preparatory to setting out, nearly frozen as we sat, flakes of snow fell ominously—few and small at first, but gradually increasing until it became a furious snow-storm, blinding both horses and men, and causing us the greatest difficulty in controlling the frightened animals, as the bitter north-east wind drove it into our faces and prevented us seeing more than a few yards ahead. We were stiff and numb with cold on arriving at Royston. 'Riding at ease' was no amelioration—riding in any sort of order was almost impossible; singers were entirely out of it; and altogether that day's march was

the cruellest I ever experienced. The following day the snowfall continued, and subsequently lessened the cold, but we marched to Huntingdon and Peterborough up to the horses' knees in snow.

From Peterborough to Bourne, to Grantham and to Newark, our progress was almost as bad. True, the snowfall had ceased, but now the roads were sheets of ice and frozen snow; and the horses, blinded and frightened before, were now scarcely less terrified by their inability to secure a foothold, and, though rough-shod, they slipped, stumbled, and trembled in every limb.

The next stages, to Retford and Doncaster, proved of much the same character; but on that from Doncaster to Selby the elements were much less inclement, and again the voice of the singer was heard in the land, though I was fated to be out of it. I had the ill-luck to be told off to ride my own horse and lead another that was said to have fallen lame; and in order that there might be no delay, I started an hour before the squadron. Up to then, I had had the companionship of my comrades, but now I was to go by myself and lead this lame or lazy horse. I nearly dislocated first one arm and then the other by trying to pull him along; but when I found he was active and game enough in hanging back, or going any way but ahead, I got angry and began to doubt his *bona fides*; and on the arrival upon the scene of a farmer, driving a horse and trap towards Selby, I stated the case to him, and at once enlisted his sympathy and practical aid. He agreed to drive behind us, and when my equine friend evinced a desire to turn rusty, the application of the whip soon caused him to forget his feigned lameness; with the result that, instead of the squadron just catching me up at Selby, I got in before them, and for my pains and cleverness got a good wiggling from the officer for overworking a lame horse!

The final journey from Selby into the stately capital of the north passed without incident, and brought our thirteen days' pilgrimage to an end.

THE MONTH: SCIENCE AND ARTS.

THE most interesting of the papers brought before the recent International Geographical Congress was that read by Mr C. E. Borchgrevink, giving particulars of his remarkable voyage to that mysterious great southern continent which, fifty-four years ago, was named in honour of Her Majesty the Queen, Victoria Land. Some geographers have estimated the size of this continent—about which nothing whatever is known save that it is not a myth—at twice the size of Europe, and it is not surprising therefore that much interest should attach to such an extensive *terra incognita*. The author of the paper in question is a young Norwegian who joined the steam whaler *Antarctic* as a sailor before the mast; otherwise, he tells us, he could not have gone at all. But although he was unable to burden himself with many instruments, he made frequent observations, the results of which were embodied in the paper read before the Geographical Congress. The

ship left Melbourne just one year ago (September 20, 1894), and a month later the first snow was seen. The *Aurora Australis* was visible almost nightly, and the intensity of the light culminated every five minutes. At the beginning of November a chain of icebergs extending for about fifty miles in length was encountered, the ice-hills being about six hundred feet high, with perpendicular sides. Multitudes of marine animals and birds were met with, and several seals were shot. Eventually in January they landed at Cape Adair, Victoria Land, which is described as a large square basaltic rock, nearly four thousand feet in height. The reading of this paper led to the formal adoption by the congress of a resolution that a completely equipped scientific expedition should be sent to the regions of the South Pole, and it is probable that the government will be asked to assist in the work.

Consul Scott, in a recent report upon the trade of the Chinese town of Swatow, remarks upon the fact that eleven million fresh eggs figure among the exports. But he tells us that all are certainly not fresh, for it is the custom to ship ducks' eggs which have been incubated to within a few days of hatching. These eggs are brought on board the steamers packed in shallow baskets, with layers of soft Chinese paper between and around them. The baskets are placed about the deck, swung to the awning supports, and occasionally are put in position near the boilers, but as a rule the heat of the climate is quite sufficient to complete the hatching of the eggs. It therefore comes about that at the end of the voyage young ducks are landed at Singapore or Bangkok in lieu of the eggs which originally formed part of the cargo. As a rule the birds come to no harm, but on the contrary exhibit quite a thriving appearance.

In the early days of ordnance, leather was commonly used as a casing for guns, and there is on exhibition at the arsenal at Venice a leathern mortar for firing shells which is said to date from the beginning of the fourteenth century. One would suppose that in these modern days, when the metals have been brought under such marvellous control, a reversion to this ancient type of leather gun could only be regarded as a mild joke. But as a matter of fact a gun, covered with raw hide, and having an inner tube of steel, has recently been subjected to official tests by the Ordnance Board of the United States Army, and has passed through the ordeal with triumph. The patentee of this curious weapon is Mr F. Latulip of Syracuse, N.Y., and his specification is dated June 26, 1894. The principal object of the invention is to cheapen and lighten the construction of gun-barrels, while at the same time they are rendered strong enough to withstand any reasonable explosive strain. It should be noted that the strips of raw hide employed in winding a casing on the inner metallic tube of the gun are first of all subjected to a chemical process which renders them when dry as hard and compact as horn. The weapons at present made under this system are only of small calibre, but they would on account of their comparative lightness be valuable, we should imagine, as mountain-guns.

The switchback railway, which for some years has been a source of delight to those of our holiday-makers who take their pleasures noisily, is likely to find a powerful rival in the Pyramidal Railway, a device which has been designed expressly for places of public amusement. According to the designs published by the company which has been formed to work this invention, its principal feature is a sugar-loaf kind of tower with a railway running round it from top to bottom, and then up a slope, at the end of which the vehicles are brought to a stop. They are in the first place carried to the summit of the tower by a lift, and the fun consists in travelling at an increasing rate of speed round and round the tower until the end of the journey is reached.

Recent returns show that in spite of the continued advance of electric lighting a larger quantity of gas is consumed in the Metropolis than ever before, one company alone selling to Londoners during the past half-year no less than ten million and a half cubic feet. Much of this vast quantity is expended in the form of motive power, for gas-engines are fast supplanting the use of steam in small workshops. Gas is also coming into increasing use for cooking-stoves. It is a matter for regret that for both these purposes a much cheaper kind of gas could not be supplied, for it is most wasteful to use one of high illuminating power where heat only is required. It is the cost of purification, and the additions to the gas necessary to bring its luminosity up to a certain candle-power, that make it at present so costly. But this state of things must remain until the companies are empowered to lay two sets of mains in our streets, one for each kind of gas.

A very curious collection of medical antiquities was exhibited by Messrs Oppenheimer at the Savoy Hotel, London, in connection with the recent meeting of the British Medical Association. It comprised a number of surgical instruments and terra-cotta models which had been found in ancient Roman and Etruscan temples and tombs. The collection was formed by Dr Luigi Sambon, who made a most interesting discovery concerning them. It seems that the models were votive offerings which were presented to the shrines of different deities by the common people, and to the eye of the lay antiquary they seemed to represent fruits. Dr Sambon, however, in studying those objects in the museum at Rome, saw at once that they represented various parts and internal organs of the human being, some deformed and some in a state of disease. It seems certain, therefore, that these models were offered as petitions for the relief, or as emblems of thankfulness for the cure, of different maladies, and may be likened to the wax models of human limbs, &c., which one can see in the present day strung up by the dozen in many continental churches. The models indicate a very intimate knowledge of anatomy, while the surgical instruments exhibited with them show that the ancient Romans must have been skilful operators. The articles include a baby's bottle of very ingenious design, and safety-pins of the identical pattern patented in modern times.

Mr Ingall, in the Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, advocating the adoption of a decimal currency in the United Kingdom, shows how the change could be brought about by slightly altering the value of some of our bronze coins, and by introducing only one new one—namely, the cent, which might conveniently be made of nickel. The proposed arrangement of the coinage would then stand as follows: The farthing would be the unit, and would be reduced four per cent. in value, making it the thousandth part of a pound; the halfpenny would be the five-hundredth part; the penny the two hundred and fiftieth; and the new coin, the nickel cent, the hundredth part of a pound. The sixpence would be renamed 'the quarter florin,' and would represent the fortieth part; while the remaining coins would respectively represent the twentieth, tenth, eighth, fifth, fourth, and second, until we arrive at the sovereign itself. The change to the decimal method would conveniently follow the proposed introduction of the metric system of weights and measures.

The Falls of Foyers, where a factory for the production of aluminium is in progress of erection, were recently visited by the Inverness Field Club, the members of which were received by Dr Common, F.R.S., who is resident director of the British Aluminium Company. Dr Common explained the nature of the works in progress, the chief feature of which was a tunnel about half a mile in length, most of which is cut through the solid rock. Through this tunnel the water will be conducted for working the necessary turbines, and the natural beauties of the place will be but little interfered with. As to debris there will be none, for the bauxite, or aluminium ore, which comes from the north of Ireland, will, by a simple chemical process, have its alumina extracted at the place where it is mined. This alumina will be brought to the factory at Foyers, and the metal will be extracted from it. The cost of manufacture will be from one-fourth to one-fifth that of producing the metal by steam-power, and this has been the great consideration in bringing the factory to Foyers, which has been purchased by the company. According to the promoters of these works, their operations, besides benefiting the inhabitants around, will have no destructive effect upon the great natural beauties of the place.

The vast powers of Niagara have at length been set to do useful work, and the generating stations at the Falls are now delivering electric energy to its first customers at a price which will astonish those who are using electricity here at home. The average charge in Britain is about sixpence per Board of Trade unit, but the Niagara company supply the same quantity, at a handsome profit too, for half a farthing. The first work in which the Niagara current is employed is the production of aluminium, and we have already seen that the minor works at Foyers are to be devoted to the same industry. It would seem that aluminium bids fair to be reckoned among the base metals, instead of being, as it was a few years back, an excessively rare one.

Collectors of coins and others will be interested

in the circumstance that the Royal Mint was busy last year in the coining of a British dollar for use in some of our Eastern dependencies. The proposal that this new coin should issue emanated long ago from trading communities of the Straits Settlements and Hong-kong; but the home authorities pointed out that it would be impossible to lay down such dollars at a price which would enable them to compete with the Mexican dollar. Again the subject was brought forward by the Hong-kong Chamber of Commerce when, in consequence of the fall in the value of silver, Mexican dollars became scarce. The proposal was now backed by bankers and others who were competent to judge of its desirability, and eventually designs for the new coin were submitted to Her Majesty for approval. The new coin will necessarily circulate in many countries which are not under the British crown, and for this reason the design required special treatment. The figure of Britannia, with the words 'one dollar,' appears on one side of the new piece, while the reverse bears the denomination in Chinese and Malay characters. Further particulars respecting this new coin will be found in the twenty-fifth annual report of the deputy-master of the Mint for 1894.

Musicians have long recognised the fact that the standard of musical pitch in this country is too high. What was C in the days when Handel was listening to the anvil strokes of the 'harmonious blacksmith' is to-day almost D. The French long ago recognised this gradual but almost insensible rise of pitch, and adopted what is known as the *diapason normal*, while in Britain we have become accustomed to a pitch which is a semitone higher. The Philharmonic Society have now determined to adopt the French standard, and would doubtless have long ago done so had it not been for the opposition of military bands and instrumentalists generally. Certain instruments—clarinets, flutes, oboes, &c.—are constructed for the old pitch, and cannot be converted to the new without an expense of about forty pounds for each band. Now the government grant for bands is eighty pounds per annum to each battalion, while seventy pounds of this goes by the Queen's Regulations to the bandmaster, consequently the expense of the necessary alterations to the instruments would come out of the officers' pockets unless a special grant is made to meet the emergency. Singers will universally rejoice at the proposed alteration, and many owners of pianos will be glad that the reproach can no more be levelled at them that their instruments are not up to 'concert pitch.'

If any one were wishing to demonstrate in a forcible manner that the British had been denied the artistic faculty, he could not possibly get a better peg on which to hang his remarks than one of our street lamp-posts. They are about as hideous in design as they possibly can be, and by their obtrusiveness spoil many a prospect. Happily these obnoxious posts are not suited to the needs of electricity, and a better type of lantern is coming into use with the new lamps. But we are still far behind our Parisian neighbours, whose street fixtures of

this kind are admirable and varied in design. Possibly the Highways Committee of London have recognised the desirability of reform, for they are about to offer prizes for the best artistic design for the posts bearing the electric lights which are presently to line the Thames Embankment. We trust that this new departure may gradually lead to a clearance of the old posts.

An interesting paper was read at a recent meeting of the Scottish Meteorological Society by Professor Michie Smith, on the thunderstorms of Madras. Almost every night sheet-lightning could be seen on the horizon, and he attributed this not to the reflection from distant flashes, as was commonly and erroneously supposed, but to the meeting of land winds and sea winds. The first would be heavily charged with dust, while the latter would be free from impurity. He had frequently noticed that when sheet-lightning occurred the clouds were double, and he suggested that these two columns of sea and land clouds might be negative and positive to one another, and thus discharge is brought about between them. The succession of flashes was sometimes so frequent that three hundred could be counted in a minute, and this would go on for as long as an hour and a half. The Indian government had decided to build an observatory at a height of 7700 feet, and although this station was primarily intended for the study of solar physics, a certain amount of meteorological work would be done. Associated with this observatory would be another building 7000 feet below it, and at a distance of three or four miles.

THE ACE OF HEARTS.

By J. S. FLETCHER.

I WAS just starting my professional career, and it was necessary to secure a convenient office. I did not want anything pretentious—an office for myself and a small ante-chamber for the boy whom I had engaged as clerk of all work would amply suit my requirements. I had served my articles with an old-established firm of solicitors in the city, and had been accustomed to great rooms filled with calf-bound volumes and shelves of ancient parchment, and I laughed to think of the difference there must be between the little office I had in my mind's eye and the big place where I had learned my law. Nevertheless I was well content to make a small beginning, and to trust to the future for bringing me an increase of business and of fortune.

Perhaps because I had two or three professional friends thereabouts, I selected Holborn as being a likely spot wherein to pitch my tent. After a good deal of looking about me, I decided to apply to an agent, with whom I went to inspect a place he recommended, a third floor of Parchment Buildings.

'Here you are, sir,' said the agent, unlocking the door of the office on the third floor. 'This is a sort of clerk's office; the principal room is beyond it, and looks out into Parchment Passage, as I told you. Nice situation this, ain't it.'

I walked in and inspected both rooms before

answering him. As regarded size and situation they were certainly all that I wanted. The outer office would do very well for my boy-clerk, and the inner would suit me. Nevertheless it was evident that a good deal of cleaning would have to be done before anybody could tenant either room. Two years at least had passed since the rooms were placed in the agent's books.

I said that the rooms would suit me providing that the rent was not excessive. Therewith we fell a-bargaining, and eventually hit on terms which met my approval. A week later I was in full occupancy of my offices. My boy-clerk sat at a little desk in the outer office and pretended to work very hard, while I sat at a big desk in my own sanctum and read law. There was really little else to do in those early days. I sent in my own office appointments, and spent two or three days in seeing them put straight. Wanting some place in which to store a quantity of old books and papers, I had a cupboard cleared of a quantity of rubbish evidently left there by the last tenant. It contained a vast amount of old letters, invoices, and papers, but these had been torn into small scraps and thrown into a corner. The woman who cleaned my rooms complained a good deal about the mess caused by these scraps of paper.

In reply to my inquiries, the woman told me that it would be about three years since the rooms had been occupied. Further interrogated, she said that she could not remember the last tenant's name: it was something foreign, and she did not know how to pronounce it. She did not know what his business was. He was always writing, she said, and sometimes had other foreigners to see him. His name was never painted up on the door of his rooms nor on the lintel down below, and it was her belief that he was no good because he kept himself so quiet. While the woman talked she was engaged in removing the mass of torn and scattered paper from the cupboard. Suddenly she detached something from the contents of her basket and handed it to me.

'He got that the very day he went away,' said she. 'For I remember going down and fetching his letters from the box in the hall below. The first thing he took out of 'em was that there card, and he laid it down on his desk and stared at it like as if he couldn't make it out. That's it, sure enough; though I ain't never set eyes on it since.' 'Spect he chucked it away with this here heap o' letters and papers.'

I took the thing from her and looked at it. It was one of a pack of cards, the Ace of Hearts, and would have attracted no attention from anybody but for one slight fact. Through the crimson heart in the centre of the white card some hand had drawn a stiletto with scrupulous fidelity. I had to look at it narrowly to make sure that the stiletto had not been engraved with the red heart. Engraved, however, it had not been; the trace of the artist's pencil was clear enough.

I took possession of the card and put it aside. During the somewhat lazy time which followed I often looked at it and wondered

what it signified. I could not help fancying that it had conveyed some sinister message to the man who had occupied my rooms three years previously. Certainly he had left his chambers hurriedly immediately after the receipt of it. I came to the conclusion that my predecessor in the offices in Parchment Passage had been engaged in some mysterious transactions of a not altogether safe nature, and had been warned to go elsewhere by the transfigured Ace of Hearts.

It was spring when I entered into occupancy of my office, and the year went by very quietly until winter set in. My practice had been remarkably limited at first, but as the months went by I obtained an increase of work, and had less time to spend in reading my calf-bound volumes. The first day of December brought me a case which promised to produce something considerable, and I remained late and went on reading until a slight sound on the landing outside made me look up, only to catch sight of the clock, which indicated a late hour of the evening.

Lifting the lamp from my desk I made my way to the door and suddenly flung it open. Then I started with amazement, for there on the landing before me, his face and figure clearly seen in the lamp-light, stood a man, tattered, sickly-looking, and more disconcerted than myself. A man of middle age apparently, and showing more than usual signs of wear and tear at that, for his dark hair was plentifully shot with gray, and his pallid face was deeply lined and seamed. My first glance at him showed me two things—that he was a foreigner and in want.

I was so much astonished at the sight of this unexpected visitor that I stood staring at him for a minute or two. He, on his part, stood staring at me. At last I found my tongue.

'Are you looking for some one?' said I, lamely enough. 'I don't think you'll find any one in at this time.'

He shook his head.

'No,' he answered. 'No—at least I was looking for you.'

'For me? Why?'

'Will you let me come in for a moment?' he said. 'Only for a moment if you please. Oh, there's no need to be afraid of me. I'm not dangerous, though I daresay I look so.'

I hesitated. He looked at me again, and said quietly:

'I used to live in these rooms.'

'Oh,' said I, dimly comprehending that the mysterious tenant stood before me. 'Come in.'

He followed me through the outer office into my own room. When he saw the cheery fire, the comfortable arm-chair by the hearth, and the supper tray laid on the side-table, he sighed. It struck me that perhaps he was both cold and hungry, and I invited him to eat. But at that he shook his head.

'I had better tell you what I want first,' said he. 'I have been on the stairs outside for more than an hour wondering whether you would allow me to enter this room. You see I used to live here, and I left very suddenly about three years ago. I daresay,' he added, 'the other people wondered why I left so suddenly.'

I quietly opened the drawer of my desk in which I had placed the mysterious Ace of Hearts, and drawing it forth, laid it before him.

'Had that anything to do with it?' I said.

He started to his feet as his eyes fell on the card, and I saw great beads of perspiration burst across his forehead under the shock which the sight of the mysterious emblem undoubtedly gave him. He looked from it to me, and from me to the card again, then he sighed heavily and sat down.

'Where did you get that?' he asked quietly.

'It was found amongst a heap of torn papers which you, I think, had thrown into the cupboard yonder. May I inquire what this means?' I said. 'Is it some signal, or a warning, or a secret message? I suppose it had a meaning for you at the time you received it.'

'It had a meaning,' he answered. 'It meant that my life was not worth an hour's purchase—that I had been sentenced to death—that the executioners were on my track. I am a Russian, and familiar with the doings of conspirators from my youth. What I have just told you is true. I was the agent of a secret society here. I offended those in power. I was condemned; and that's the warning.'

'So you fled?'

'More fool I! I fled—to come back at last as you see me. A beggar almost—starving, homeless.'

Again I pressed him to eat. I was fascinated by his story, and wished to hear more.

'Not till I have told you why I came here to-night. I came to recover something that I left here when I fled. I left it because I knew it was safe in the hiding-place I had contrived for it. I was going I knew not whither—possibly into rough places and amongst desperate men. I came back here to London at last, and a great longing came over me to see it once more. That is why I came to your door to-night, resolved to ask you to admit me. The picture is here, and I shall find it.'

He rose, and crossing the room approached a corner of the floor and carefully removed the carpet which I had had laid down. Lifting a loose board underneath, he presently withdrew from the cavity a parcel wrapped in many sheets of strong paper, and came forward to the light again.

'You did not know that you had this so near you,' he said, blowing the dust away from the parcel and proceeding to unwind the various wrappings. 'And now, look!'

An exclamation of wonder and delight burst from my lips. He held before me the portrait of a young and lovely woman, evidently the work of some great miniature painter, and framed heavily in gold and jewels. The frame must have been worth a small fortune in itself, and yet I scarcely noticed it, so beautiful was the face it contained.

The stranger held the picture from him and looked steadily at it in the lamp-light. Then he drew it nearer and kissed the face reverently.

'She is dead,' he said. 'And she died a martyr. She was born to all that the world calls good; she died an exile and in poverty. She was my sister.'

He restored the frame to its wrappings and fastened it up again, and rather against my recommendation placed it in its old hiding-place. He refused my offer of supper, and said he had no more to tell.

With that he bowed, shrugged his shoulders, and went out. I followed him to the head of the staircase and watched him descend. Then something prompted me to open the window and watch him leave the house by the front door. He came out and walked up the passage into Holborn. I was about to shut the window and return to my room, when I saw two men steal out of a neighbouring door-way and follow my visitor. So swift and stealthy were their movements that I had no time to cry out before they had vanished.

I locked up my office and went home, much excited by the events of the evening. I had never had an adventure of such a startling description before, and had never expected to find that my little shabby office contained within it all the elements of a romance. I went to bed, and could not sleep for thinking of it. I was sorry by that time that I had allowed my strange visitor to leave the portrait in my room, and I determined to do something towards finding him and compelling him to remove it.

I went to my office next morning by way of Long Acre. Passing the corner of one of the squalid streets leading towards Drury Lane, I became aware of a small crowd of people gathered outside a house and doing their best to obtain an entry thereto, despite the presence of two or three burly policemen. I went up, and knowing one of the latter, inquired the reason of the commotion.

'It's a murder, sir,' said he. 'And a very rum murder it is, too. Foreign chap found in this here empty house, stabbed through the heart. Like to go in, sir? There's the coroner's officer and the superintendent inside just now. This way, sir. Now then, make way, there; this here gentleman's an official.'

I followed the man inside into a small room destitute of furniture. They had fetched a bench from somewhere and laid the dead man on it. Somehow I was not surprised when I saw him. I had felt certain from the first that I was going to see my strange visitor of the previous evening. And there he lay before me, dead for many hours, the doctor said, with a dagger driven into his heart through a card on which the Ace of Hearts was still recognisable in spite of the blood that had dyed it.

'A foreigner,' said the doctor. 'This is the work of some of those accursed secret societies.'

I went on to my office. My boy met me at the foot of the stairs with a scared look on his face.

'If you please, sir,' said he, 'I think there's been thieves in. The door was burst open when I came with the key this morning.'

I ran upstairs into my room. Everything was in order there. I went straight to the corner, and tore away the carpet and the loose board, and examined the cavity beneath. My hands met nothing. The portrait was gone!

To say that I felt a strange sense of alarm on finding that the portrait, to which recent

events had attached such tragic memories, was gone, is needless.

I thought it best to tell the police all I knew. The officials at Scotland Yard to whom I unbosomed myself received my story with interest, but not with surprise. They were too well accustomed to the dark methods and deeds of the secret societies, whose members flee to London when the greater continental cities are forbidden them. Nevertheless, my story did nothing to help them. Indeed, I was told that the perpetrators of these secret murders were seldom found out.

Several months passed away. The cares of business were beginning to press on me, and I had little time in which to speculate on the late mysterious events. I had my first important case in hand, and it required every moment and every thought. I was glad when the courts rose and the long vacation came to bring me a brief holiday. I had won my case, and had gained no small amount of present fame and future gain by doing so. About the second week in August I travelled down to Hull; and thence took steamer to Stavanger for a month in Norway. Coming back by the same route, I found it necessary to stay a night in Hull, and as I had never been there before, I spent the evening in looking round the docks and quays of that ancient port. There I came across a further link in this remarkable story. Wandering along the pavement of the quay which runs from the town to the river, I paused to look in at the window of one of those little dirty shops where marine store dealers gather together all manner of odds and ends, and what was my surprise to see the portrait which had once been hidden in my office!

I paused and looked again through the dirty window. No, there was no doubt about it; that was the portrait. The gold frame was gone, and there were marks on the edges of the picture which seemed to indicate that it had been roughly removed. The face, however, was unmistakable. I had been too much struck by it at first sight to forget its wonderful beauty.

On entering the shop a dirty-looking man, evidently a foreigner, came forward from some den in the rear, rubbing his hands and asking what he could do for me.

'Nothing particular,' I answered. 'I just wish to glance at your stock of curiosities. I am rather fond of picking up rare articles.'

He answered that I was welcome to look round, and went on to say that he had some beautiful things in the way of binocular glasses and chronometers if I was thinking of taking a long voyage. While he chattered volubly about his goods I was leaning over the little partition which separated the shop from the window, examining the portrait from a better point of vantage. I had now no doubt whatever as to its identity, and determined to buy it at whatever cost. After some haggling, I purchased the picture and a Turkish dagger for one guinea.

When I reached the hotel I went up to my room and examined the portrait carefully. It was a small canvas, stretched on a frame twelve inches by nine, and across the back, probably with the idea of keeping out dust and dirt, a

stout piece of rough canvas had been tightly stretched and stitched. There was nothing to show that any extraordinary history attached to the picture. I returned to London and locked up the portrait in my office safe.

Time went on, and as my practice increased, I took more rooms in the house in Parchment Passage. Some of them were much more suitable for a private office than the one in which the portrait had been hidden, but I determined to remain in the latter, and devote the others to my clerks. I had a half-superstitious feeling that if ever the mystery of the previous tenant came to be solved, it would be in that room.

It was about two years after the murder, and circumstances then required that I should stay late at the office. I was engaged in settling some difficult business with a client, and he remained with me until half-past nine o'clock. As I was about to turn out the lamp which burned on my table, I heard some one coming slowly up the staircase. I had left the private door of my office open, and could hear the sound distinctly. I turned up the light again, and waited. At first I thought the steps were those of my client, who had possibly forgotten something and was returning, but another moment told me they were not. He was a young, active man, likely to come up three steps at a bound; the man now climbing the stairs was evidently neither young nor active, for he came slowly and apparently with some difficulty.

I went to the door and looked down at the landing. The gas still burned there, and it shone on the figure of a man who was climbing the last flight of stairs. He was a tall, well-built man of fine proportions, but something about the stoop of his shoulders suggested hardship and privation. I could see very little of his face, but I noticed that his beard, which was of unusual length, was gray almost to whiteness. He seemed to be well dressed, and I made up my mind that his intentions were peaceful.

The stranger accosted me in very good English. Somehow I had made up my mind that he was a foreigner. After he had explained his business, which was to find Alexis Vitrefsky of 3 Parchment Passage, a light began to break in upon me. The man he was in search of was the previous tenant! Perhaps the mystery of the portrait was about to be explained.

'Was the person you are in search of a Russian?' I asked.

'Yes, yes,' he answered eagerly. 'Certainly, a Russian. A man of about my own age, but perhaps younger in appearance. I have had things to make me look old.'

'Will you come in a moment?' I said, and led the way into my office. 'Perhaps I can give you some information.'

I gave him a chair, and he sat down. Now that the lamp-light fell full on his face, I saw that he was an extraordinarily handsome man, and that evident suffering and privation had not robbed him of his good looks.

'I shall be very grateful for any information respecting Alexis,' said he. 'And I thank you in anticipation. Perhaps I ought to tell you who I am. I am the Prince Z—.'

He mentioned a name which made me stare with astonishment. Prince Z— was an escaped political prisoner, who, after spending many years in the Siberian mines, had escaped in a singularly daring fashion, and had recently published a narrative of his adventures and sufferings.

I sat down and told Prince Z— all that I knew of Alexis Vitrefsky; how he had suddenly left the very room in which we were then sitting, and had returned to it two years later under mysterious circumstances. I told him of the events of that night; how two men had watched Alexis leave my office, and how the unfortunate man had been murdered during the night, and the portrait stolen from its hiding-place. He heard me with anxiety and disturbance, and when I told him that the portrait was gone, he rose up and paced the floor in evident distress.

'Then I am indeed ruined!' said he. 'Sir, that portrait meant everything to me. It was indeed the property of Alexis, but its possession meant more to me and to my children than I can tell you. But I see you do not understand me. With your permission, I will narrate to you certain passages in my sad history.'

I was half-tempted, on seeing his distress, to tell him how strangely I had recovered the portrait; but I refrained, remembering that he might, after all, be an impostor, and that it would be better for me to hear his story before I told mine. I therefore begged him to proceed.

'It is not a pleasant story,' said he, 'that I have to tell you. As you know, I am of the new party in Russia. Since boyhood I have worked, planned, and suffered for my country, and in consequence I have been hated by those in power. Until some years ago, however, I was allowed to pursue my own course in comparative freedom. Now and then the police warned me that I was approaching too near the line in my writings; but as I happened to belong to one of the best families, and was rich and powerful, I was practically allowed to go my own way. At last, however, I found that neither my noble name nor my riches were to help me. Information reached me that I was to be arrested and severely dealt with. Fortunately I had been somewhat prepared. My wife was in Paris; my two young sons were at school in Germany. I had secured to them a moderate sum in case anything happened to me. I had never dreamt that all I had would be confiscated. Such, however, was to be the case, according to my informant's news, which had come from the highest source. I was to be stripped of land and goods and reduced to beggary.'

'I hurriedly consulted with Alexis Vitrefsky, an old student-friend of mine, as to what should be done. He was then unknown to the authorities, and was about to start for a tour in England. We went to an English banker in St Petersburg, and by his advice I turned all my negotiable securities into English notes. The good banker gave me fifty English notes of a thousand pounds each for my papers. These I handed to Alexis. He was to carry them to

England and preserve them until I could join him. I was watched, but I hoped to escape.

'Alexis was puzzled how to carry the notes. If he had them about his person he might be searched, and awkward questions as to his right to them put to him. People bound on a three months' European tour do not usually carry fifty thousand pounds' worth of English notes with them. Alexis, however, quickly solved the difficulty. It was his practice to carry with him wherever he went the portrait of his dead sister, whom he regarded with feelings of absolute veneration. She, like myself, had engaged in the new movement, and she had suffered. Alexis brought his cherished portrait, handsomely mounted in gold, to my house. We placed the notes behind the canvas, and stitched a strong piece of coarse cloth across the frame, so that none could see where the notes lay hid. Knowing that Vitrefsky was my true friend, and that he would take care of the portrait, I felt my little fortune to be safe.

'Alexis left for England, and within a few days of his departure I was arrested. I spent some weary years in the fortress of St Peter and Paul; subsequently I was sent to the mines. But before I left the fortress I had news of Alexis. By means of those trusted messengers who are to be met with even amongst the government officials, he contrived to send me a cipher letter, telling me that he was living in London, and giving this house as his address. Whenever I was free I was to come here to receive the sum I had entrusted to him.

'I have now told you all. I am free, and I have come here, only to find that Alexis is murdered and the portrait gone.'

I was so convinced that the prince was telling me the truth, that I no longer hesitated about handing the portrait over to him. Before doing so, however, I asked him one more question.

'Pardon me,' I said, 'but what of your wife and boys?'

He shook his head.

'My wife died during my imprisonment,' he answered. 'My boys are living here in London. Poor lads, they had met with indifferent treatment in Germany, and I fear that they will find life hard, now that I have no means of helping them.'

'Then your estates were confiscated?'

'Everything I had was confiscated. When I finally escaped I was absolutely penniless.'

I went to my safe and took the portrait from the drawer in which I had placed it on my return from Hull. Without saying a word, I handed it to the prince, who received it with an expression of the utmost astonishment.

'See if your money is still there,' said I.

'I have no doubt of it,' he answered, as he cut away the stitches from the canvas back. 'But how did the picture come into your possession? You told me it had been stolen.'

I told him how I had found the portrait in the shop at Hull, and had recognised it again. While I talked, he turned back the canvas and discovered the bank-notes securely wrapped in

folds of paper, exactly as he had described. His delight at finding himself once more wealthy was wonderful to witness. 'Poor Alexis!' he said, suddenly remembering the friend to whom he had trusted his sole resources. 'I have my own theory as to his death. I have heard that he became closely connected with one of the more determined secret societies, and had the ill-fortune to break with certain of its most powerful members. These people never forget. Alexis was probably tracked down to the very last.'

'But the portrait?' I said. 'Why should the murderers steal that?'

The prince shrugged his shoulders.

'Ah,' said he; 'probably while Alexis was conversing with you in here and showing you the portrait and its valuable frame, the two men told off to kill him were watching you. Of course they stole the portrait for the sake of the frame.'

The explanation seemed a likely one. I remembered that there had been nothing to prevent Vitrefsky's assassins from following him up the stairs that night, or from listening at the open door while he conversed with me.

Prince Z— carried his bank-notes away with him. He wished to reward me, saying that but for me the money would have been lost to him. The only reward I could consent to take, however, was the picture. That I kept, and still possess, a memento of what I think a remarkable romance.

Prince Z— now resides permanently in London, prematurely aged by the trials of his past life, but undisturbed, so far as I know, by government spies or the emissaries of secret societies.

ICI-BAS.

FROM THE FRENCH OF SULLY-PRUDHOMME.

HERE below the lilacs die,
All the song-birds heavenward fly;
I dream of a summer for ever and aye.

Here below the lips that greet
Leave no imprint when they meet;
I dream of a kiss that will ever be sweet.

Here below the lovers mourn
Friendships dead and hearts forlorn;
I dream of the ties that shall never be torn.

WILMOT VAUGHAN.

*. TO CONTRIBUTORS.

1st. All communications should be addressed to the Editor, 339 High Street, Edinburgh.

2d. For its return in case of ineligibility, postage-stamps should accompany every manuscript.

3d. To secure their safe return if ineligible, ALL MANUSCRIPTS, whether accompanied by a letter of advice or otherwise, should have the writer's Name and Address written upon them IN FULL.

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